

## **The New Imperialism**

---

### **I. Background: 1815-1870**

By 1815 the world had known some four hundred years of continuous European imperialism. In a sense this was the outward expansion of European power over other continents. Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, British colonial empires had followed one another throughout these four centuries. Always these extensions of control over non-European territories had involved, in varying proportions, trading, missionizing, adventure, settlement, loot, national pride, conquests, and wars between rival powers. The very list of countries emphasizes the lead taken in this expansion by the western, maritime peoples.

But it is not necessary to cross sea, rather than land, to become an imperial power. The creation of the great dynastic empires of the Habsburgs and the Ottoman Turks, the traditional drive eastward (*Drag nach Osten*) of the Germans in quest of lands for settlement and trade, the continental conquests of Napoleon, the rapid advance of Russia into southern and central Asia during the nineteenth century, even the expansion westward of the United States during the same period, are all examples of the same process carried out, it so happened, within continental land areas rather than across oceans.

In 1870 there was, therefore, nothing whatever new about the extension of European control and power over other parts of the earth. Yet the very word "imperialism," was, it seems, a mid-nineteenth-century invention, and the generation after 1870 has come to be known, in some specially significant and discreditable sense, as "the age of imperialism." In what sense can these decades between 1870 and 1914 be so described?

#### **A. Hobson**

A famous British economist, J. A. Hobson-and following him, Lenin-attributed the colonial expansions of these years to special new economic forces at work in the most industrialized nations of western and central Europe. This economic explanation of the urge to imperialism is usually taken to mean that the basic motives were also the basest motives and that, whatever political, religious, or more idealistic excuses might be made, the real impulse was always one of capitalistic greed for cheap raw materials, advantageous markets, good investments, and fresh fields of exploitation.

The argument has commonly been used, therefore, to denounce the events, and to attack the men, parties, and nations that took part in them. The argument, in brief, is that what Hobson called "the economic taproot of imperialism" was "excessive capital in search of investment," and that this excessive capital came from oversaving made possible by the unequal distribution of wealth. The remedy, he

maintained, was internal social reform and a more equal distribution of wealth. "If the consuming public in this country raised its standard of consumption to keep pace with every rise of productive powers, there could be no excess of goods or capital clamorous to use imperialism in order to find markets." It is undeniable that the search for lucrative yet secure overseas investment played a very great part in the European urge to acquire colonies at the end of the nineteenth century.

## **B. Lenin**

Lenin elaborated the argument, in his pamphlet on *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), to emphasize the current importance of finance capital rather than industrial, and the priority of the desire to find new outlets for investment rather than new markets. His thesis was that imperialism was "a direct continuation of the fundamental properties of capitalism in general," and that "the war of 1914 was on both sides imperialist." He used this thesis to explain the fact, which Marx and Engels had declared to be normally impossible in a capitalist society, that there was a conspicuous general improvement in the economic condition of workers in the more advanced countries. In the backward colonial peoples, argued Lenin, capitalism had found a new proletariat to exploit; and from the enhanced profits of such imperialism it was able to bribe at least the "aristocracy of labor" at home into renouncing its revolutionary fervor and collaborating with the bourgeoisie. But such improvement could only be temporary, and since imperialist rivalries must lead to war, all workers alike must eventually suffer from it.

This argument ignored the awkward facts that much of the foreign investment of the European powers was not in colonial territories at all but in countries such as South America and Russia, and that the standard of living of the working classes was high in countries like Denmark and Sweden which had no colonies, but low in France and Belgium which had large colonial territories. Nor, of course, could it be a general explanation of imperialism, which had existed centuries before there was a "glut of capital" and before finance capital was as plentiful or as well organized as it was in the later nineteenth century. But it was a convenient and persuasive enough case, at the time, for explaining the First World War in exclusively economic terms, and for presenting it as the result of capitalist activities and the misdistribution of wealth.

## **II. The New Imperialism**

What made it seem particularly necessary to find some special reason for modern imperialism was both the dramatic suddenness of its reappearance and its pre-eminence in the policies of the powers during the last quarter of the century. Until after 1870 national policies, and even more national public opinion, in most European countries had been hostile to colonies. By the 1820's several countries, after having long colonial connections, had lost these connections without suffering any apparent economic deprivation. By 1815 France had lost most of her colonial possessions in America and in the east, and Spain had lost her vast South American territories. Before that the thirteen colonies in America had broken away from Britain, and by 1822 Portugal lost Brazil.

Advanced opinion everywhere welcomed these events. Adam Smith had argued that the burdens of colonialism outweighed its alleged benefits; radicalism favored laissez faire; Bentham urged France to "Emancipate your Colonies"; Cobdenism preached free trade and the abolition of all commercial privileges; and in 1861 France opened to all nations the trade of her colonies. Gladstone expected the whole British Empire to dissolve in the end, and in 1852 Disraeli, who agreed with Gladstone in little else, made his famous declaration that "These wretched colonies will all be independent in a few years and are millstones around our necks."

As late as 1868 Bismarck, who until a decade later was opposed to colonial aspirations for Germany, held that "All the advantages claimed for the mother country are for the most part illusory," adding that "England is abandoning her colonial policy: she finds it too costly." But he was wrong, and only four years later Disraeli announced his conversion to a policy of imperial consolidation and expansion. The tide of opinion turned abruptly. The chorus of anti-colonialism before 1870 was so strange a prelude to an era of especially hectic colonial scramble that some extraordinary explanation seems to be called for.

It is improbable that this explanation can be entirely, or even "basically," economic. However important the economic forces were, they cannot explain why France, one of the least fully industrialized of the northwestern European nations, was the one which had already set the pace of expansion by more than doubling her colonial possessions between 1815 and 1870, when she gained firm footholds in Algeria, Senegal, and Indochina; nor why after 1870 it was the political republican leaders, Jules Ferry and Leon Gambetta, who took the initiative in further colonial expansion in Tunisia and Tonkin, despite the great unpopularity of such expansion with public opinion in France.

It is not a mere thirst for exporting surplus capital which can explain the new shape given to the British Empire by the invention of "dominion status" and the readiness with which complete political independence was granted first to Canada, and later to Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa. British commercial and capitalist interests knew that trade with the United States had increased after it won political independence; that migration to the independent United States had been greater than to any of the territories which had remained under British control; and that Argentine railways had offered opportunities to British investors no less attractive than had Indian railways. German economic penetration of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Ottoman Empire was remarkably effective without any of these territories becoming German colonies.

## **A. Africa and Eastern Asia**

What was most strikingly novel about the new imperialism was its intense concentration upon two continents: Africa and eastern Asia. These were the only two important areas of the globe still not brought under European influence before 1870. The decades between 1870 and 1914 speedily completed the expansion of European influence and civilization over the whole of the earth; and it was

accomplished in an era when the realism, ruthlessness, and rivalries of European national governments were exceptionally great. It therefore had a temper uniquely masterful and remorseless, brooking no obstacles and pushfully self-assertive. This quality came as much from the nature of European politics as from the urges of European economic development.

There was no international organization fitted to exercise any kind of control or regulation over the scramble for territories in which the great powers now indulged. The naked power politics of the new colonialism were the projection, onto an overseas screen, of the interstate frictions and rivalries of Europe. It was this combination of novel economic conditions with anarchic political relations which explained the nature of the new imperialism.

Among the economic forces behind it, the urge to find new outlets for the "glut of capital" and fresh markets for industrial output were in general more important than either the quest for raw materials or the factor of overpopulation. The special attraction of Africa and Asia were, indeed, that they offered many of the raw materials needed by the multiplying factories of Europe: including cotton, silk, rubber, vegetable oils, and the rarer minerals. The products of the tropics were especially welcome to Europe. But many of these raw materials could be, and were, got by trading without political control.

The pressure of population in Europe was becoming great by the early twentieth century, but it still found free outlet in migration to the traditional areas of reception in the United States and Australasia. Neither Africa nor eastern Asia offered climatic or economic conditions inviting enough to attract large-scale white settlements, and the pressure of population within Japan, China, and India was now itself so great as to exert a steady demand for fresh outlets. It was against Asiatic immigrants, not European, that the main barriers began to be raised.

Chinese were excluded from the United States after 1882, from Hawaii after 1898, from the Philippines after 1902. The United States excluded Japanese laborers in 1907, and by the Immigration Act of 1917 barred the entry of other non-Europeans, especially Indians and inhabitants of the East Indies. Canada took similar action against the Chinese after 1885 and against the Japanese after 1908. New Zealand restricted Chinese, and in 1901 Australia passed a federal Immigration Restriction Act with the same purpose. The Union of South Africa barred Chinese in 1913, and some South American states followed suit. The main impediments to European migration came only after 1918, and the nineteenth-century flow out of Europe actually reached its peak in 1914.

The quest for markets in which to sell manufactured goods was more important. But here, again, the political factor was no less important than the purely economic. Until 1870 British manufacturers of textiles, machinery, and hardware had found good markets in other European lands. After 1870 Germany, France, Belgium, and other nations were able to satisfy their own home markets, which they began to protect against imports from Britain by tariff barriers. They even began to produce a surplus for which they sought markets abroad. With increasing saturation of

European markets, all tended to look for more open markets overseas, and in the competitive, protectionist mood of European politics they found governments responsive enough to national needs to undertake the political conquest of undeveloped territories.

For this purpose, Africa and Asia served admirably. It was in these economic and political circumstances that the urge to exploit backward territories by the investment of surplus capital could make so much headway. It began especially after 1880, and gained rapidly in momentum until 1914. (Of the annual investment of British capital between 1909 and 1913, 36 per cent went into British overseas territories.) By then the main industrial countries had equipped themselves with an abundance of manufacturing plant, and the openings for capital investment at home were more meager.

The vast undeveloped realm of Africa and Asia offered the most inviting opportunities, provided that they could be made safe enough for investment and there seemed no better guarantee of security than the appropriation of these lands. Again governments were responsive, for reasons that were not exclusively economic. The ports of Africa and the Far East were invaluable as naval bases and ports of call, no less than as inroads for trade and investment. Given the tangle of international fears and distrusts in Europe during these years, and the ever-present menace of war, no possible strategic or prestige-giving advantage could be forfeited. Once the scramble for partitioning Africa had begun, the powers were confronted with the choice of grabbing such advantages for themselves or seeing them snatched by potential enemies. The "international anarchy," contributed an impetus of its own to the general race for colonies. To say, as it was often said after 1918, that imperialism had led to war, was only half the story; it was also true that the menace of war had led to imperialism.

It was normally the coexistence of economic interests with political aims which made a country imperialistic; and in some, such as Italy or Russia, political considerations predominated. With nations as with men, it is what they aspire to become and to have, not only what they already are or have, that governs their behavior. There was no irresistible compulsion or determinism, and no country acquired colonies unless at least a very active and influential group of its political leaders wanted to acquire them. Britain had long had all the economic urges of surplus population, exports, and capital, but they did not drive her to scramble for colonies during the 1860's as much as during the 1870's and after. Neither Italy nor Russia had a surplus of manufactures or capital to export, yet both joined in the scramble; Norway, although she had a large merchant fleet which was second only to that of Britain and Germany, did not. Germany, whose industrial development greatly outpaced that of France, was very much slower than France to embark on colonialism. The Dutch were active in colonialism long before the more industrialized Belgians.

What determined whether or not a country became imperialistic was more the activity of small groups of people, often intellectuals, economists, or patriotic publicists and politicians anxious to ensure national security and self-sufficiency,

than the economic conditions of the country itself. And, as the examples of the British, French, Dutch, and Portuguese show, nations that had traditions of colonialism were more prompt to seek colonies than were nations, such as Germany and Italy, that had no such traditions.

## **B. Adventurers and Missionaries**

Besides the direct political motives of imperialism—the desire to strengthen national security by strategic naval bases such as Cyprus and the Cape, or to secure additional sources of manpower as the French sought in Africa, or to enhance national prestige as the Italians did in Libya there was a medley of other considerations which, in varying proportions, entered into the desire for colonies. One was the activities of explorers and adventurers, men like the Frenchmen, Du Chaillu and De Brazza, in equatorial Africa; Or the Welshman, Henry Morton Stanley, in the Congo basin; or the German Karl Peters in east Africa. Prompted by a genuine devotion to scientific discovery, or a taste for adventure, or a buccaneering love of money and power as was Cecil Rhodes in South Africa, men of initiative and energetic enterprise played an important personal part in the whole story.

Christian missionaries played their part too in the spread of colonialism. The most famous was the Scot, David Livingstone. A medical missionary originally sent to Africa by the London Missionary Society, he later returned under government auspices as an explorer "to open a path for commerce and Christianity." When he had disappeared for some years in quest of the source of the Nile, Stanley was sent to find him, and duly met him in 1872 on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. When Livingstone died in Africa in 1873, his body was taken to London under naval escort, to be buried in Westminster Abbey as a great national hero. But Livingstone was only one among many, and France, even more than Britain, sent organized missions into Africa to convert the heathen to Christianity.

The Catholic missions of France under the Third Republic were exceptionally active, and provided two thirds (some forty thousand) of all Catholic missionaries. They were spread all over the world, including the Near and Far East; and in 1869 Cardinal Lavigerie, installed only the year before in the see of Algiers, founded the Society of African Missionaries, soon to be known because of their Arab dress as the "White Fathers." By 1875 they spread from Algeria into Tunisia, and set up a religious protectorate that preceded the political protectorate. Gambetta said of Lavigerie, "His presence in Tunisia is worth an army for France." Other French missions penetrated into all parts of Africa, setting up schools and medical services, often in the footsteps of the explorers and adventurers. Belgian missionaries were active in the Congo as early as 1878.

## **C. Administrators and Soldiers**

Yet another element in the growth of imperialism was the administrator and soldier the man with a mission, who was not a missionary but who welcomed an opportunity to bring order and efficient administration out of muddle. Such men

became the great colonial proconsuls Lord Cromer in Egypt, Lord Lugard in Nigeria, Lord Milner at the Cape, Marshal Lyautey in Morocco, Karl Peters in German East Africa.

Without such men the extent and the consolidation of European control over Africa would have been impossible. The sources and the nature of the urge to imperialism were multiple, and varied considerably from one country to another. It was not just that trade followed the flag, but that the flag accompanied the botanist and buccaneer, the Bible and the bureaucrat, along with the banker and the businessman. The unexplored and unexploited parts of the earth offered a host of possible advantages which, in the competitive world of the later century, few could resist seizing; they were seized, amid the enthusiastic approval of the newly literate nationalist-minded masses in Britain and Germany, or amid the sullen resentments of the French and Belgians.

In 1875 less than one tenth of Africa had been turned into European colonies; by 1895, only one tenth remained unappropriated. In the generation between 1871 and 1900 Britain added 4.25 million square miles and 66 million people to her empire; France added 3.5 million square miles and 26 million people; Russia in Asia added half a million square miles and 6.5 million people. In the same decades Germany, Belgium, and Italy each acquired a new colonial empire: Germany, of one million square miles and 13 million people; Belgium (or, until 1908, Leopold II, King of the Belgians), of 900,000 square miles and 8.5 million inhabitants; and Italy, a relatively meager acquisition of 185,000 square miles and 750,000 people. The old colonial empires of Portugal and the Netherlands survived intact and assumed increasing importance. It was a historical novelty that most of the world should now belong to a handful of great European powers.

These immense acquisitions had no close correlation with the ascendancy of one political party. In Belgium they were originally an almost personal achievement of the king; in Britain and Germany they were mainly the work of conservative governments which had turned empire-minded, though in Britain former radicals like Joseph Chamberlain and liberals like Lord Rosebery supported them; in France they were the work of radical republicans like Jules Ferry and Leon Gambetta, and in Italy, of liberals like Depretis; in Russia they were mainly the work of the official military class and bureaucracy. The beneficiaries of imperialism were not always the initiators of it; and although King Leopold, Cecil Rhodes, and many of the other empire builders amassed great personal fortunes and powers, so too did many who merely stepped in later to reap the rewards of high administrative offices and rich concessions for trading and investment.

#### **D. Popular Support**

On the other hand some of the initiators; such as Ferry in France and Crispi in Italy, earned only disrepute and violent hatreds for their achievements. Wherever there was any considerable section of public opinion generally in support of imperialism, it tended to be canalized into active propagandist associations and pressure groups, often distinct from any one political party. In Britain, Disraeli committed the

Conservative party to a general policy of imperialism in 1872, backed by the purchase of shares in the Suez Canal in 1875 and by the conferring of the title "Empress of India" upon Queen Victoria in 1877. In 1882 a Colonial Society was formed in Germany, and in 1883, a Society for German Colonization. In the same year the British conservative imperialists founded the Primrose League, and the liberals soon followed suit with the Imperial Federation League.

The British Navy League of 1894 was followed in 1898 by the corresponding German Flottenverein-incidents in the naval rivalry of the two powers. They championed the rapidly increasing naval expenditures of their respective governments. The more explicit arguments for colonialism, and for the sea power which it necessitated, were as much expressions as causes of the expansion.

### **III. The Scramble for Colonies**

By no means all the acquisitions of colonies caused disputes among the powers. Some of the earliest, like the French conquest of Algeria in the earlier years of the century or of Annam in 1874, and even some later acquisitions, like the British conquests of Nigeria and Ashanti in the 1890's, aroused little or no opposition from other European powers. Occasionally one power made pacts with the encouragement or assent of others: Bismarck encouraged France to expand into Tunisia as a diversion from continental affairs that was likely to embroil her with Italy. Bismarck and Jules Ferry co-operated in 1884 to summon an international conference at Berlin to settle amicably the future of the Congo in central tropical Africa.

To the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 came representatives from fourteen states-roughly all the states of Europe except Switzerland. It was occasioned mainly by the activities of the International African Association, which had been formed in 1876 by King Leopold II of Belgium. This Association had sent J. M. Stanley on explorations into the Congo between 1879 and 1884, where he made treaties with the native chiefs and established Leopold's influence over vast areas of the interior. By the beginning of 1884 Britain and Portugal, apprehensive of this development, set up a joint commission to control navigation of the whole river. The colony of Angola south of the Congo mouth had been held by Portugal since the fifteenth century, and now Britain recognized Portugal's claim to control the whole mouth of the river. It looked like an alliance of the older colonial powers to strangle the expansion of the new; for France was increasingly interested in the tropical belt north of the Congo River, and Germany, in the Cameroon still further north. Leopold therefore looked to France and Germany for help, and the result was the Berlin Conference.

It was concerned with defining "spheres of influence," the significant new term first used in the ensuing Treaty of Berlin of 1885. It was agreed that in future any power that effectively occupied African territory and duly notified the other powers could thereby establish possession of it. This gave the signal for the rapid partition of Africa among all the colonial powers, and inaugurated the new era of colonialism. In the treaty it was agreed that Leopold's African Association would have full rights over most of the Congo basin, including its outlet to the Atlantic, under



international warrantee of neutrality and free trade. Slavery was to be made illegal. Both the Niger and the Congo were to be opened on equal terms to the trade of all nations. The treaty was, in short, a compact among the powers to pursue the further partition of Africa as amicably as possible; and an attempt to separate colonial competition from European rivalries.

For a decade after the Berlin Conference, imperialistic conservative governments ruled in Britain and Germany and anti-colonialist protests subsided in France and Italy. Their policies of mercantilism and protection, along with the popular mood of assertive nationalism in all four countries, favored colonialism. Expansion into Africa was unbridled. In 1885 the African Association converted itself into the Congo Free State, with Leopold as its absolute sovereign. The success prompted other powers to set up chartered companies to develop other African areas. Such companies, granted by their government's monopoly rights in the exploitation of various territories, became the general media of colonial commerce and appropriation in the subsequent decade. The German and British East African Companies were set up by 1888, the South Africa Chartered Company of Cecil Rhodes to develop the valley of the Zambezi in 1889, the Italian Benadir Company to develop Italian Somaliland in 1892, the Royal Niger Company in 1896.

By these and every other means each power established protectorates or outright possessions, and made their resources available for home markets. Germany enlarged and consolidated her four protectorates of Togoland and the Cameroons, German Southwest Africa and German East Africa. France took Dahomey, and by pressing inland from Algeria, Senegal, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast, she linked up her West African territories into one vast bloc of French West Africa. She drove inland along the north bank of the Congo to consolidate French Equatorial Africa. On the east coast she established her claim to part of Somaliland and by 1896 conquered the island of Madagascar.

Great Britain was already firmly based on the Cape, and began to push northward. She appropriated Bechuanaland in 1885, Rhodesia in 1889, and Nyasaland in 1893, so driving a broad wedge between German Southwest Africa and German East Africa and approaching the southern borders of the Congo Free State. This expansion, largely the work of Cecil Rhodes, involved her in constant conflicts with the Dutch Boer farmers, who set up, in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, two republics of their own. The Boer War of 1899 was the direct result. From the Indian Ocean she also pressed westward inland, founding British East Africa by 1888 and taking Uganda by 1894.

In West Africa, Nigeria was acquired by the activities of the Royal Niger Company between 1886 and 1899. Italy, indignant at the French occupation of Tunisia, had laid the basis of an Italian East African Empire in Eritrea by 1885, and added Asmara in 1889. In the same year she appropriated the large southern coastal strip of Somaliland and claimed a protectorate Over the African kingdom of Abyssinia. But in 1896 her expeditionary forces were routed by Abyssinian forces at Adowa, and she was obliged to recognize Abyssinian independence.

By 1898 the map of the African continent resembled a patchwork quilt of European acquisitions, and south of the Sahara the only independent states were Liberia and Abyssinia, and the two small Dutch Boer republics. The North African coastline, especially the provinces of Morocco in the west and Libya and Egypt in the east, remained a troublesome source of great power rivalries.

## **Colonial Africa**

---

In 1415, Portuguese soldiers crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to establish small outposts on the Moroccan coast. From this modest beginning a momentous historical process of European subjugation of Africa was initiated. The forces of intrusion gathered momentum over the centuries, reaching their peak with the "scramble for Africa" late in the nineteenth century. Every square inch of Africa fell at least briefly under European rule. After World War II, the tide of colonial domination began to recede rapidly from 1960 on. With the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, only the original foreign beachheads, Ceuta and Melilla, remained under European rule.

### **I. Effects of Colonialism**

The most historical factor shaping contemporary African politics remains the encounter with imperial rule. Colonialism defined the boundaries of the contemporary political units; dominant political forces and leaders in many countries began as movements of nationalist resistance. The social map was changed beyond recognition, with novel categories of class stratification and transformation of lines of racial, ethnic, and religious differentiation. Economic infrastructure and production patterns were shaped by the interests and needs of the colonial powers.

#### **A. The slave trade**

From the sixteenth century to the eighteenth, the main form of European intervention in Africa was the slave trade. Perhaps 12 million Africans were landed in the Western Hemisphere, many others having perished en route. This commerce was carried out from coastal establishments from Senegal to Angola; it began the remaking of African political geography, as its impetus led to mercantile African states formed around the supply of slaves.

Early in the nineteenth century, as the slave trade declined, European powers began to extend their influence into the interior by degrees; this "informal empire" of zones of influence was supplanted by colonial annexation. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, intensifying rivalries between European powers and new military technologies (especially the machine gun) brought rapid partition. Britain,

France, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Spain divided nearly all the continent among them.

Conquest was primarily a military undertaking. In its wake, colonizers were confronted with urgent tasks: structuring and institutionalizing their domination. Britain and France in particular had some experience in colonial rule, but African conditions were quite different. The shape of the colonial state responded to the imperatives of organizing alien rule over vast territories at minimal cost to imperial treasuries.

## **B. Consolidating colonial control**

The first crucial goal was to consolidate colonial control over the territory. At the Berlin Conference in 1884 and 1885, where diplomatic agreement was reached among imperial powers on major outlines of the partition, the principle of "effective occupation" was enunciated. To confirm its title to a zone of African territory, a colonial power had to demonstrate to its European rivals that it exercised military control over the area; failing this, an imperial rival might snatch it away.

"Effective occupation" was to be achieved, however, with small outlays. Finance ministers and parliaments in Europe insisted that military commitments be kept small, and that the newly conquered territories pay for their own administration. Important consequences for the colonial state flowed from the twin imperative of consolidating hegemony and generating revenue.

## **C. European administrative outposts**

A grid of European administrative outposts was created, to guarantee effective occupation. European personnel were costly, though, and only modest numbers could be covered by colonial budgets. In 1900 the colonial administration in Nigeria had only a few hundred British officers, and even later it never had more than a few thousand. African intermediaries were indispensable to complete the infrastructure of control. Often these were found by conferring colonial recognition upon the ruler of an African state or community. In return for his collaboration in upholding the colonial order and participation in implementing its directives (collecting taxes, building roads, supplying labor), his authority was confirmed and reinforced by the power of the colonial state. In other areas, needed intermediaries were found among the subaltern employees of the colonizer (soldiers, messengers, clerks).

Superior power was the ultimate currency of colonial rule. With this as lever, intrigue, artifice, and diplomacy were inexpensive alternatives to sheer brute force for consolidating the framework of European hegemony. The revenue imperative compelled early initiative to enforce restructuring of the economy. The subsistence-oriented rural economies in most of Africa offered little extractable surplus for the colonial state. The discovery in South Africa of rich diamond deposits in 1869 and gold in 1885 aroused hopes of treasure troves, but these were initially disappointed. Most of the mineral wealth of Africa was to be discovered only after World War II.

## **D. Primary mobilizable resources**

The primary mobilizable resources in most territories were African labor and land. With direct or indirect coercion playing a central role in most areas, Africans were compelled to produce crops for sale. Because there was little internal market, these were mainly commodities salable on the international market: cotton, peanuts, palm oil, cocoa, and sisal, among others. In parts of north, east, and southern Africa where temperate climatic conditions prevailed, European settlement was encouraged. African land rights were extinguished by the colonial state, and fertile tracts were offered to prospective settlers for nominal payments. Access to low-wage labor was required for these farms to prosper; colonial administrations cooperated in its recruitment. African labor was also conscripted, with slender or even no remuneration, to create the basic infrastructure of roads and railways for communication.

The major policy instruments for mobilizing labor were imposition of some form of head tax on African peasants and regulations requiring labor service on such public works as roads. To earn the money required for the head tax, the African peasant was compelled to cultivate a cash crop or to seek temporary employment with a European enterprise. To enforce their hegemony, European administrators were armed with an array of arbitrary ordinances, permitting summary punishment for such offenses as disrespect for a chief or district officer and failure to comply with an administrative order.

By the 1920s, the colonial order had been institutionalized nearly everywhere. Taxation of external trade provided a modest but sufficient basis for financing the colonial administration. The system of African intermediaries was institutionalized and maintained local order. An increasingly professional and almost exclusively European bureaucratic elite manned the policy-making levels of the administration and an apparatus of regional control and supervision. The head tax acquired the familiarity of long usage and African labor increasingly became available, even at low wages, without muscular conscription. The more harshly coercive features of the colonial state were less visible.

## **E. Ideological justification**

By way of ideological justification, the colonial system made three major claims.

- In its framework of local administration and justice, carried out by African intermediaries under European supervision, the colonial state purported to supply "good government."
- The colonial state asserted its performance of a "civilizing mission," in sponsoring introduction of European culture. The culture-dispensing function was in good part carried out by Christian missions, except in Islamic zones where their presence was unwelcome.
- The colonial state, as self-appointed trustee for the subjugated populace and mankind in general, charged itself with developing the natural resources. This responsibility was entrusted to the metropolitan private sector, often

induced by large concession, state-assured supply of labor, and fiscal advantages.

## **F. Changes after World War II**

After World War II, colonialism in Africa was placed on the defensive. Global politics was now dominated by the Soviet Union and the United States, who had no ultimate stake in perpetuating European rule. A rising tide of nationalist protest in Africa challenged the legitimacy of alien occupation. In response, the colonial powers made "development" a more explicit goal, with large-scale public investment programs. Also, "welfare" of the subject population became a significant state responsibility; for the first time, sizable public resources were committed to post-primary education, rural health facilities, safe water supplies, and other basic needs. As these were supplied, the state expanded greatly. In the final decade of British colonial rule in Ghana, from 1947 to 1957, state expenditures rose tenfold. In Zaire (then Belgian Congo), state outlays in 1960 were forty-five times higher than in 1939.

The colonial experience in Africa was distinctive in several ways. Africa was the last continent to fall under direct European rule; colonial administrations were organized at a historical moment when the state had far greater resources (communications, military technology, professional bureaucracies) than had been available in earlier centuries. The revenue imperative and absence of established fiscal machinery (like the land tax, which supported colonial administrations in Asia), led to forcible restructuring of rural economies, to compel or induce African labor into a cash economy that could provide subsistence for the colonial state. Culturally, Africa was held in low esteem by its colonizers. Colonial conquest of Africa coincided with an outburst of evangelical fervor in Europe and North America. Usually supported by the colonial state, the Christian mission societies deployed more personnel than the state administration, and had profound influence as vehicles not only for proselytizing, but also for diffusing European cultural values.

Although broad similarities marked colonial influence, there were important variations. The several colonial powers in Africa applied somewhat different doctrines of administration. These reflected the political culture of the home country and the character of its own state institutions. For France, Germany, and Belgium the concept of the state was shaped by the absolutist tradition, which stressed centralization, hierarchy, and bureaucratic dominance. At home, this culture was overlain with nineteenth-century notions of constitutionalism, which were stripped away in designing state structures for conquered African domains. The British state had a distinctly different texture, with looser structure, greater diffusion of power, and more regional variation and autonomy.

## **G. Varied styles of African administration**

These differences produced varied styles of African administration. The British, in seeking intermediaries, were more inclined to recognize and make use of existing African rulers, whose institutions were adapted to the purposes of the colonizers;

this colonial ideology was known as "indirect rule." As a consequence, customary political structures retained more significance in areas formerly under British rule. Other colonizers, while often making use of existing chiefs as administrative intermediaries, treated them more as simple local agents of a centralized bureaucracy.

The centralized, Bonapartist state ideology also had implications in the cultural sphere. Particularly in the French and Portuguese colonies, policy was aimed at permanent incorporation of the African domains. Ultimate "assimilation" of the subject populations was proclaimed as the goal. Although this doctrine was sporadically and incompletely applied, it had significant influence in cultural policy and on the character of the African elite produced by the colonial experience.

In the former French colonies the first generation of post-colonial leaders, such as Leopold Senghor of Senegal or Felix Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast, were profoundly affected by French culture, and had developed intimate and durable ties in the upper echelons of French political society. In the Portuguese colonies, an Afro-Portuguese class, Portuguese-speaking, often partly Portuguese in ancestry had an important role both as intermediaries in colonial times, and as leaders of the liberation movements that threw off metropolitan rule.

Other significant variables affecting colonial influence included the scale of European settlement, and the type of resource base. In territories where European immigration was extensive, the settler population was a powerful interest group, with colonial policy skewed to serve its interests. This was particularly marked in Algeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Angola, where Europeans at their peak constituted 5 to 10 percent of the population. In South Africa, the European community was granted exclusive control of the state when Britain transferred sovereignty in 1910.

Territories that either were distant from the coast or lacked known natural resources (or both) experienced more skeletal colonial occupation and minimal development. The extreme here is Chad, which entered independence with an unusually weak state structure; by the end of the 1970s it had all but ceased to exist. Other countries with minimal colonial presence are Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Somalia, and Botswana.

## **II. Legacy of the Colonial State**

The contemporary African state system is affected in a number of ways by its colonial origins.

### **A. State reflects colonial partition**

To begin with, the territorial definition of the state reflects the administrative boundaries of the colonial partition. A handful of African states have historical continuity with a pre-colonial epoch, but most originated as units of colonial administration. The imperial powers paid little heed to African cultural or political

units in dividing up the continent. As a consequence, African state boundaries frequently divide ethno-linguistic groups. Also, African states have, with few exceptions, extensive internal diversity-ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious.

## **B. Institutionalizing alien rule**

A second major legacy of the colonial state was organized as a structure of institutionalizing alien rule; its vocation was domination of a subjugated population. A command mentality, a paternalistic mode of rule, a hegemonic relationship with the populace: these attributes of the colonial state are deeply ingrained in the daily routines of administration. Legally and practically, the colonial state considered the indigenous populace as subjects, not citizens. The African leadership that succeeded to power has, to varying degrees, endeavored to eradicate this heritage. The inertia of the colonial state tradition is powerful, however, and continues to color state-society relationships.

## **C. The process of yielding power**

A third crucial effect of the colonial state lay in the process by which it yielded power to African successor regimes. One by one, in the three decades following World War II, colonial powers became persuaded that nationalism was an irresistible force. In a handful of cases, this conclusion was forced upon the colonizer by prolonged armed struggle (Algeria, 1954 to 1962; Guinea-Bissau, 1961 to 1974; Mozambique, 1964 to 1975; Angola, 1961 to 1975; Zimbabwe, 1973 to 1979). In most instances the withdrawing power recognized the need for accommodation with nationalist forces by negotiation. Once this conclusion was reached, the colonial power retained considerable means to influence the terms and method of decolonization.

The formula for decolonization generally called for creating political institutions closely modeled on the colonizing power's constitutional structure. The formal institutions of constitutional democracy-elected parliaments, competitive parties, and politically recruited cabinet-were hastily grafted onto the authoritarian bureaucratic colonial state. Yet in the home countries this process was a long and gradual one, before constitutional democracy was institutionalized. African states were asked to make an instantaneous transition from colonial subjugation to representative democracy. Enormous difficulties arose, and in most the initial constitutional structures failed to survive.

Some differences in this process are worth noting. Limited African participation, through appointive membership on consultative legislative councils, had existed before World War II in West African territories under British rule, and in coastal Senegal, then a French colony. Except for territories with settler populations, British colonial power tolerated earlier and more extensive associational activity, including political parties, than did other colonial powers. It is no accident that popular commitment to democratic values and insistence on a competitive party system appear most strongly rooted in Nigeria, where African political participation and expression began early.

The French, in keeping with the centralist ideology of the French state, permitted modest but very visible African representation in the French National Assembly in Paris long before an African voice was tolerated in Africa itself. A Senegalese leader, Blaise Diagne, entered the French Parliament in 1913 and served as junior minister in four French cabinets. Not until 1956 were territorial assemblies with significant power created in French-ruled tropical Africa. The Belgians prohibited African political activity until urban elections in 1957 and parties were not tolerated until 1959, the year before independence.